



ROCK ART 2014

San Diego's 39th Annual Rock Art Symposium
Presented by the San Diego Rock Art Association

November 1, 2014

Mingei International Museum Auditorium

8:00 REGISTRATION OPEN

9:00 MORNING SESSION

Conference Introduction

Were the Great Mural Migrations Movements of People or Ideas?

Jon Harman, DStretch.com, Pacifica, California

Sites in the Sierra de Guadalupe indicate that this sierra was the homeland of Great Mural Art. The art then moved north to the Sierra de San Francisco and Sierra de San Borja in separate migrations. In this paper I document the evidence for the migrations and discuss whether the movement was of people or of ideas.

House of the Sun: A Possible Summer Solstice Alignment in the Western Mojave

Peter Merlin, Lancaster, California

The Burham Canyon site (CA-KER-273) in the foothills of the Tehachapi Mountains is well known for its spectacular polychrome pictograph panel. The rock art is associated with several sets of bedrock mortars, lithic scatters, and other cultural deposits as noted by R.W. Robinson of Antelope Valley College during a 1979 survey. Not noted in that survey was a single mortar-like feature inside a small rockshelter that is otherwise devoid of art or artifact. In the weeks leading up to the Summer Solstice this element interacts with a "sun dagger" in ways that cannot be coincidental. Though some issues involving the timing of events are problematic, this site clearly deserves additional study.

A Winter Solstice Surprise in Black Canyon, California

John M. Rafter, Pico Rivera, California

In 1979 while working as assistant field director for the late Wilson G. Turner on his rock art recording project in Black Canyon, California, funded by Earthwatch, the author stumbled upon a large rock art design, a whopping 36 feet in length. Found on a shelf on the southwest side of Flat Top Mountain overlooking the canyon, the design consists of one meandering pecked line that goes from rock to rock in an almost continuous fashion, involving a total of 52 rocks. The actual subject of the design is in question, but subsequent analysis and comparison led the author to another nearby site called, by Turner, Surprise Outcrop, which contains two similar petroglyph designs. The larger design on the shelf of Flat Top

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Mountain appeared to be angled toward winter solstice sunrise and the same alignment was suspected to involve one of the two similar petroglyph designs at Surprise Outcrop. When winter solstice sunrise was observed at this second site, an unexpected perfect alignment occurred on another rock with the same design behind the observer. The accuracy of the light and shadow pattern interacting with the petroglyph design was checked by returning to the site to observe sunrise in the weeks before and after the main winter solstice event, with the conclusion that what occurs at winter solstice is extremely accurate. Scant ethnographic information may help to partly understand the connection between the petroglyph design and the annual solar event.

10:10 – 10:40 MORNING BREAK

Cupules in the Eastern Mojave Desert

Don Christensen, Costa Mesa, California

The Eastern Mojave Desert portion of California, Arizona, and Nevada has a great concentration of petroglyphs and pictographs. The author and his colleagues have recorded 438 sites with over 38,000 elements during the last 25 years. Within this inventory are 38 sites with 1,177 cupules. By comparison to other areas of California and the Great Basin this is a very low rate of occurrence and the reason for this is not readily apparent. Despite this, cupules do occupy a significant position within the landscape, as they are frequently associated with pecked and painted imagery as well as habitation and milling sites, in addition to being isolated features. There is minimal ethnography to suggest their purpose so this paper will rely on the archaeological and environmental context of cupule sites to offer some observations relative to function.

Janitorial Paradox—Rock Art Conservation in Suburbia

Steve Freers, Murrieta, California

Southern California is a great place to live, always has been. Unfortunately for cultural heritage localities, their incremental exposure to the negative impacts of urban sprawl is accelerating, as is the burden of coping with the aftermath. Graffiti has become the signature bane of rock art sites once “protected” by certain levels of anonymity and inaccessibility. Pictographs are particularly sensitive and immensely difficult to restore to a semblance of acceptability. While the last 40 years has seen the unprecedented growth of interest in rock art studies, little practical progress has been made in assisting land managers who must deal with knuckle-head vandalism, limited budgets, and a paucity of expert consultants. This paper will focus on one particular locality in southern California and illustrate the janitorial cycle of rock art conservation in a suburban setting.

An Overview of the Wanjina Rock Art Tradition from the Kimberley Region of Australia

Jeff LaFave, San Diego, California

The Kimberley is an amazing region in terms of landscape, history, aboriginal culture, biological resources, and rock art. Indeed, the Kimberley contains one of the greatest collections of rock art in the world and is most famous for Bradshaw (Gwion) and Wanjina style paintings. The Wanjina tradition goes back at least 4,000 years and continued up through European contact, with paintings continuing to be “refreshed” during the 20th century. The Wanjina art form is not just limited to rock art and has become a national symbol of aboriginal identity. Wanjina depictions represent ancestral beings from the sea and sky, and the style can also include various associated animal forms (such as snakes, kangaroos, birds, fish, and lizards). Depictions of actual Wanjinas are typified by halo-like headdresses, mouthless faces, thin noses, and large, round eyes with fringed eyelashes. The paintings are often very large in scale and are static as opposed to the Bradshaw/Gwion art that is often dynamic and usually smaller in size. The rock art sites often contain burials and probable “offerings” such as shells. They also frequently include stone “pathways,” cairns, and/or cupules, and other art styles are sometimes present (though none of these additional features are necessarily contemporaneous with the Wanjina art).

Gong Rocks of the Southwest

Ron Barber, Stone Calendar Project, Los Alamos, New Mexico

The Stone Calendar Project has been studying rock art sites in the Southwest and northern Mexico, identifying glyphs that mark specific times of the year using unique light and shadow interactions. Stone calendars have been found throughout the west in many different cultures, marking the solstices, equinoxes, and other indigenous dates. Many of the sites exhibit evidence of additional cultural rituals that occurred at or near the calendar sites. One of the interesting findings is the presence of ringing rocks, sometimes referred to as “gong rocks.” These rare basalt rocks have a unique composition that generates a ringing sound when struck. Ethnographic reports from the Southwest reveal knowledge of these rocks but with little additional information. Most of the ringing rocks identified are arranged to be supported at a few points, providing free edges that are less damped, producing a clear ringing sound. The points at which the rocks are struck are easily identified and produce a wide range of tones. The ringing rocks are generally very close to the petroglyphs, and some

glyphs are engraved into the ringing rocks. So called gong rock sites are well known in Africa and India, and a few sites are identified in the Southwest. Three sites have been identified in New Mexico, along with several others in Arizona, all of basalt composition, at rock art sites. Even at the sites where the rocks are located, only a small percentage of the rocks exhibit these ringing properties. The discussion presents a brief overview of the Stone Calendar Project, focusing on the description of ringing rocks and the types of sounds produced.

12:00 LUNCH BREAK

1:30 AFTERNOON SESSION

Looking Into Power: Crook Symbol Systems and Visual Codes in Rock Art Imagery

Bernie Jones, Tustin, California

The concept of supernatural power as understood and used by Native American groups is difficult to define, discuss, or portray. Early societies attempting to illustrate human interaction with ubiquitous power developed codes or abstract symbol systems to visually describe this synergy. One of the most compelling symbols developed was the crook form. A concrete, visual metaphor for power, the crook emblem is multivalent and exemplifies the many overlapping strata contained within and represented by the symbol. This paper outlines sequential research into crook and related imagery and introduces a rare, uniquely distinctive use of this form in the rock art of the American Southwest.

The Discovery of Abundant Rancho Bernardo Style Rock Art at W-255/SDI-12209

Gregory Erickson, Poway, California

The present study investigates the rock art at a prehistoric village site (W-255/CA-SDI-12209) situated at the western edge of the city of Escondido in San Diego County. Malcolm Rogers first surveyed the site in 1919. Its potential importance to Rancho Bernardo Style (RBS) rock art comes from his field notes where he mentioned a highly weathered red maze on the surface of a large granite boulder. For almost a century, no progress has been made in understanding this pictograph, nor was it known whether there is additional rock art at the site. Toward this goal, DStretch enhancement was used to identify and characterize the rock art at W-255, leading to the discovery of an impressive amount of rock art which, for the most part, exhibits a pattern of regularly spaced rectilinear and curvilinear lines, typical of the RBS. Some of the panels are truly magnificent, composed of a variety of extraordinary one-of-a-kind motifs. Unusual images include a rectilinear petroglyph, a white or cream-colored pictograph, a painting on the top side of a granite boulder, and what could be a stylized anthropomorph. W-255/SDI-12209, with previous minimal recording, is revealed to contain some amazing imagery.

The Little Black Mountain Petroglyph Site: Examples of Sound Symbols?

Steven J. Waller, Rock Art Acoustics, La Mesa, California

The Little Black Mountain Petroglyph Site in northwest Arizona south of St. George, Utah, contains hundreds of petroglyphs—some vivid and some heavily repatinated—thought to be associated with cultures of the Great Basin, Western Anasazi, and Lower Colorado River spanning thousands of years. The easily accessible rock art is at the base of a 500-foot mesa, from which echoes can be heard loud and clear. A large centipede-like motif with a smaller similar design to its left seems to represent the double echo that can be heard from that spot: one major echo followed by a softer echo to the left. Other examples will be presented.

A Study of Physical Weathering Mechanisms of Rock Art in the Helan Mountains of China

Youzhen Yang, Hanlin Ma, and Zifan Guo, Ningxia University, Yinchuan, China

An international heritage, thousands of open air rock art panels in the Helan Mountains, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, China, are subject to degradation and loss resulting from weathering, and most of them cannot be restored. The present paper describes several types of impacts in detail, represented by pitting, hollowing, and crack propagation. Data on temperature, humidity, and wind were collected pertaining to the rock as part of a study on the factors thought to impact weathering. XRD analyses were undertaken on rock samples, and the microstructures were investigated by means of SEM. Combined with freeze-thaw tests and wind tunnel tests in the laboratory, these investigations of weathering mechanisms have potential for use to help guide remediation efforts directed at reducing the weathering problem.

2:50 – 3:10 AFTERNOON BREAK

The Writing on the Walls: Neolithic Rock Art at the Ness of Brodgar

Chloe Berghausen, University of San Diego, San Diego, California

Nestled on a narrow spit of land between two megalithic structures, the Ness of Brodgar site has forced Neolithic archaeologists around the world to regard the Orkney Islands as a ceremonial focal point. Radiocarbon dating shows it to have

been occupied from 3200–2300 BCE, and recent discoveries have hinted at use well into the Bronze Age. The walls that stand today strike visitors as being built only just yesterday. The exquisite masonry and delicate carvings belie the fact that the site is over 5000 years old. One of the most enthralling finds the site has to offer is the discovery of paint on the walls. Made from hematite and limonite (both locally available), the decorative mineral residue had been found in only two of the numerous structures on site. The difficulty in identifying pigmented panels results from environmental deterioration as well as confusion with the natural oxidization of the sandstone. In the 2014 digging season, the innovative DStretch program pioneered by Jon Harman was used methodically for the first time in Scotland to search for the elusive painted walls. This past summer's work yielded possible paint in two new structures. This paper discusses these preliminary findings and the potential of DStretch as a tool among archaeologists specializing in Neolithic Europe.

In and Around the Heads of Snakes

Eve Ewing, San Diego, California

Is it possible that the liminal lifestyle of snakes, aspects of their life cycle, and morphology lend themselves to symbolic metaphors of power and duality found in native beliefs that are then illustrated in rock art? Two sites from Baja California may illustrate these themes. Both sites have paintings located within or next to natural rock art shelters that resemble the heads of large snakes. One is the well known Serpent Cave from the Sierra de San Francisco in Baja California Sur, Mexico. The second is from the remote area of Tinaja Yubay in northern Baja California. Related themes appear in Rock Art sites from Sonora, Mexico; Utah; and Little Lake, California..

Where the Rain Snakes Hide: The Rock Art of Silozwane Shelter, Matopo Hills, Zimbabwe

Anne Q. Stoll, Claremont, California

The Matopo Hills of western Zimbabwe are home to hundreds of richly painted caves and shelters. This corpus of painted art, created at least 5000 years ago, is the work of Late Stone Age hunter-foragers known today as the Bushmen or San people. The San rock art of the Matopos is not as well known as that found in South Africa, Zimbabwe's neighbor to the south, yet these images are easily as rich in symbolic and narrative significance. Silozwane Shelter, situated in the communal lands just south of the Matopos National Park boundary, has a long history as a sacred site in part because of the so-called Rain Snakes painted there, now more easily seen using digital enhancement techniques. Photography by George Stoll.

Rock Art and Ancient Astronomical Observation in Central California

Christine Grimaldi Clarkson, Merced College, Merced, California

Located in the western Sierra Nevada foothills of central California, CA-MRP-402 exhibits 103 rock art panels. Recent archaeological research at this site explored the activities that took place and how this site fits into the broader cultural landscape. This paper discusses the results of these efforts, including the discovery of an intentionally altered landscape that created an astronomical observation area with consistent equinoctial solar and shadow alignments.

The Rock Art 2014 logo is based on a Rancho Bernardo Style panel on Ladera Piedra Road in Rancho Bernardo.

Our thanks to the Mingei International Museum for use of their auditorium for this year's Symposium, and especially to Events Coordinator Martha Ehringer and Assistant Security and Facilities Manager Nhan Ha.

For details on Membership and Programs of the San Diego Rock Art Association, visit our website at

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